

# CGP2014M - Concept Development - Assignment 1

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## Experiment 1

### Theme + Premise

The theme chosen was “Time kills you”. This is an interesting theme, as it encourages shorter experiences with a tighter focus. It also creates opportunities for replayability, as games with harsh time limits often have to be played over and over. When building the premise for my game, the lenses I found most appropriate were *The Lens of Atmosphere* and the *Lens of Goals* (Schell, J., 2008, p.180,387).

Starting with the moodboard<sup>[Fig 1]</sup>, the game would start out with a vibrant, colorful aesthetic that players can marvel at, that would slowly regress and creep back to the mundane the further into the game players progress, making them question their actions. This is reflected in some of the media chosen for the moodboard, such as *Midsommar* (2019) and the *Hotline Miami* (2012) series, where the bright visuals and wacky themes are used to obscure something more sinister.

The player is poisoned, as well as under the effects of several different psychedelics. They have a limited amount of time to find an antidote and cure themselves of the poison and calm down before they expire.

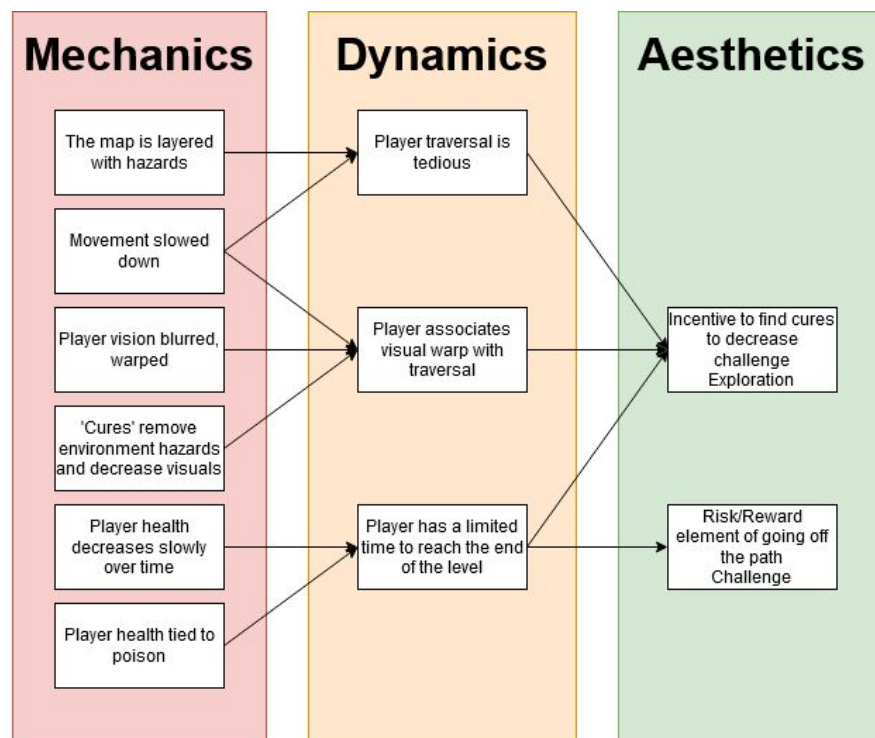
### Core Gameplay

When it comes to the **core gameplay**, blocking the players path through the world are several hallucinated “barriers”, be them doors, pitfalls, winding corridors or shifting walls. These make the simple act of walking from room to room much more difficult. The objectives themselves serve as the only properly interactive elements, with the rest of the game consisting of slow traversal from one objective to the other. This traversal is made slower and more convoluted by the barriers mentioned earlier. *"This slow movement speed can make the traversal of large areas of game space feel laborious, requiring a player's sustained input of the 'W' key to continuously move forwards"* (Muscat, Goddard, Duckworth and Holopainen, 2016, p.4), encouraging the player not only to explore but to make exploration less tiresome by finding and curing themselves of the hallucinogens.

Each of these barriers has a puzzle in the world associated with it, which can be found with exploration<sup>[Fig 2]</sup>. Solving a puzzle removes the hindrance from the game world as the player calms down. This creates a risk/reward scenario, where the player can risk taking a detour in order to make reaching the final antidote easier - this incorporates the *Lens of freedom* (Schell, J.,

2008, p.319) into the game, as the hallucinogens exert indirect control over the actions of a player.

At the beginning of the game, the player is made aware that not everything around them is real, and should also be made aware of their poisoned condition, preferably through an in-game illustration of their affliction, such as the player throwing up or looking at their veins. What this does is kickstart the generation of an **Alterbiography**, an “*active construction of an on-going story that develops through interaction with the game world’s topography*” (Calleja, G., 2009, p.5)



In many games with drug or hallucinatory sequences, the visuals are dialed up to 11, often past what is considered ‘normal’ within the context of the game. Unlike other games, the hallucinations in this game are removed at the player's own discretion, forming **core gameplay moments** as they interact with the visuals of the game themselves, as well as fulfilling the *lens of Freedom* and *lens of Goals* (Schell, J., 2008, p.319,387)

### Player Experience Goals

As such, many of my **player experience goals** revolve around the unknown, exploiting it to make the player want to persist until they complete the game before time runs out.

- **Open decisions** to focus on short term reward vs long term risk - fix the poison that is going to kill you, or focus on curing the various psychedelics so that the final task is easier to complete?

- **Unnerving visuals**, which get closer and closer to ‘normal’ the more tasks a player completes.
- **Mystery** - as the visuals fade, the player begins to wonder where they actually are, and whether or not hallucinations would have been preferred.
- **Unease** - both at the beginning, making you want to focus on curing your afflictions, and towards the end, when you begin to regret your actions.

### Dramatic Arc

The **narrative** of the game is incredibly modular<sup>[Fig 3]</sup> - the intro and finale are always experienced, but the optional objectives can be completed in any order, or not at all:

- Receives exposition rapidly as they realise their ailments, first the harmless ones and then the poison, meaning they must rush to cure themselves or face succumbing to the toxin.
- The player is presented with an open map<sup>[Fig 2]</sup>, leading to the ward containing a cure for the poison, though the path is blocked by pitfalls, doors and narrow gaps. Additionally, paths leading to cures to the other drugs are presented, for them to complete in any order as they slowly deteriorate:
  - **Pitfalls** - Solving this platform puzzle removes all pitfalls from the game.
  - **Doors** - Finding a way to open the puzzle door removes hallucinatory doors across the game.
  - **Narrow space** - Reaching the end of the maze pulls the walls apart in the game, making traversal simpler.
  - **After solving each puzzle**, the player is awarded exposition via the environment around them, as nature retreats and slowly regresses back into the cold, industrial look of the building the player is in.
- Arriving at the final room, the player faces a challenging puzzle, littered with pitfalls, interactable doors and narrow spaces making it harder and more tedious to complete. Once done, the player will have successfully gained access to the cure - they relieve themselves of the poison. They will also be confronted with the true nature of the facility they are in.

### Game Critiques

#### Critique 1

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The interpretation of the theme here is really well executed. Likewise, the mechanics presented within each section fit the narrative and aesthetic of each of the levels, e/g treading water in the bargaining level, lack of light in the depression level etc. I also love the use of indirect control in levels like anger and depression, as it fulfills the *lens of Collusion* (Schell, J., 2008, p.334) perfectly.

I feel the use of the fourth wall break as a core gameplay moment could be explored more - perhaps incorporate it into later levels, bargaining with the player to help them, and asking their advice for the final decision? This could further increase the bond between the player and Amber, as well as giving further impact to the final decision, as if you're making it together. Additionally, Outside of the final decision being made to wake or pass away, what tough moral decisions does the player make?

## Critique 2

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The idea behind this is novel, and is rarely explored within games at all, let alone puzzles. Similarly, the complexity and possible confusion involving the mechanics is offset nicely by the simple monochrome visuals - the use of colour can aid the player in paying attention to the right elements when interacting with the game world.

Another boon of the visuals is reinforcing the narrative goal of the game, with the stark contrasts aiding in the feelings of isolation, as well as being more appealing to the chosen target demographic, who may be turned off by complex and detailed visuals.

A good deal of thought would need to be put into the opening of the game, due to the nature of both the playerbase and the core mechanics. Older generations tend to have more difficulty when picking up titles that involve a 3D environment (Sjölander, M., Höök, K., Nilsson, L.G. and Andersson, G., 2005. p.549) and as such careful tutorials on the operation of the camera, especially considering that the primary mechanics of the puzzles involves 'looking' back and forth regularly.

# Experiment 2

## Key Brief

### Mortal Comfort/Streets of Calm



#### Introduction

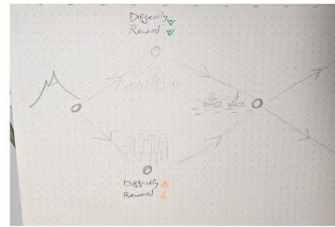
In this side-scrolling hug'em'up, you play a group of Giants that live high up on the Eiger, coming down from their slumber parties to bring peace and love to the neighboring villages, all of which have grown barbaric and upset with themselves and each other over the past 100 years.

#### Core Mechanics

The player moves through each level encountering angry villagers, all of whom must be calmed down with killer combos of hugs, soft pats on the head, and offerings of Punsch.

In-between visits to the village (right), the player must keep track of the Giants morale, swapping out between various characters in order to prevent any single giant from getting too sad as the journey progresses, else risking certain giants going home and being unavailable for use in the rest of the game.

If all giants give up and go home, the game ends.



#### Enemy Generation

One of the major mechanics involves randomly generating the various villagers that try to stop the giants from bringing peace and love to all. Each of these villagers would have to be pacified in their own way, depending on their appearance, actions, and capabilities. This adds an element of thought to the game, and prevents it from falling into just another repetitive beat-em-up.

1	2
<b>Enemy Size</b> 1 Small 2 Medium 3 Large 4 Huge	<b>Enemy Type</b> 1 Villager Elder 2 Young man 3 Young woman 4 Angry Farmer 5 Upset merchant 6 Baron 7 Business 8 Village idiot
<b>Attack Type</b> 1 Slowly hitting 2 Quick hitting 3 All round 4 Ranged 5 Random	<b>Weapon</b> 1 Stick 2 Stick 3 None 4 None 5 Short sword 6 Hammer

Enemy Size	Enemy Type
1 Small	1 Villager Elder
2 Medium	2 Young man
3 Large	3 Young woman
4 Huge	4 Angry Farmer
	5 Upset merchant
	6 Baron
	7 Business
	8 Village idiot
	9 Knight
	10 Hermit

Many variations on this were created, originally starting with tables to determine each enemies weaknesses and their vulnerabilities separately (above), but this was deemed too complex and convoluted in testing. After playing around with some options (right) we settled on the table below.

Size	Weapon
1 Small	1 None
2 Small	2 A Stick
3 Medium	3 A Pitchfork
4 Large	4 Two Hatchets
5 Large	
6 Huge	

#### Strengths

- The game adds layers to the beat-em-up without adding too much in the way of complexity, allowing it to still run on 80s era hardware.
- Subverts expectations by focusing on stopping violence rather than causing violence, as is the norm in these games.
- Easy gameplay, nearly identical to the regulars of the genre whilst still offering a different experience.
- Secondary loop offers a deeper incentive to keep playing

#### Weaknesses

- Simple gameplay could turn off some once the novelty wears off
- No incentive to keep playing, rewards/points system needed
- Currently only single player - local multiplayer could add much more to both the primary and secondary loops.

## Experiment 3



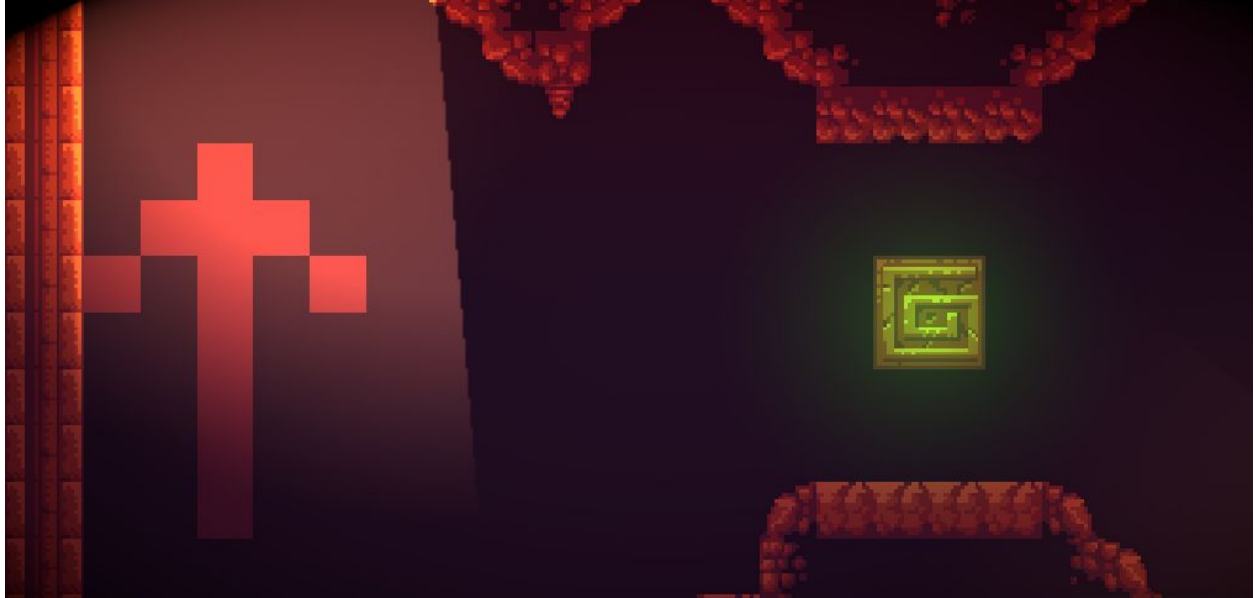
My third game is a basic 2D platformer consisting of a series of short levels that end in a loop, allowing the player to attempt to replay the level over and over again for a faster time.

The player has two main methods of locomotion:

- They can jump, which has been fine tuned to allow for greater control in the air.
- They can reverse gravity, which flips the player up into the sky and back again on the next press.

The gravity switch can be done up to two times before the player must touch the ground again to reset, preventing the player from ‘falling with style’ and flying from level to level. In order to give maximum feedback to the player regarding this mechanic, the switching of gravity not only has its own sound effect, but the player character changes colour with each switch, informing the player of how many ‘switches’ they have left before they’ll plummet to the nearest surface.

This, coupled with the sound effects that accompany jumping, landing and switching all contribute to the *lens of Juiciness* within the game (Schell, J., 2008, p.265) as well as the *lens of feedback*, as it lets the players know their current state at all times, through both visuals and sound.

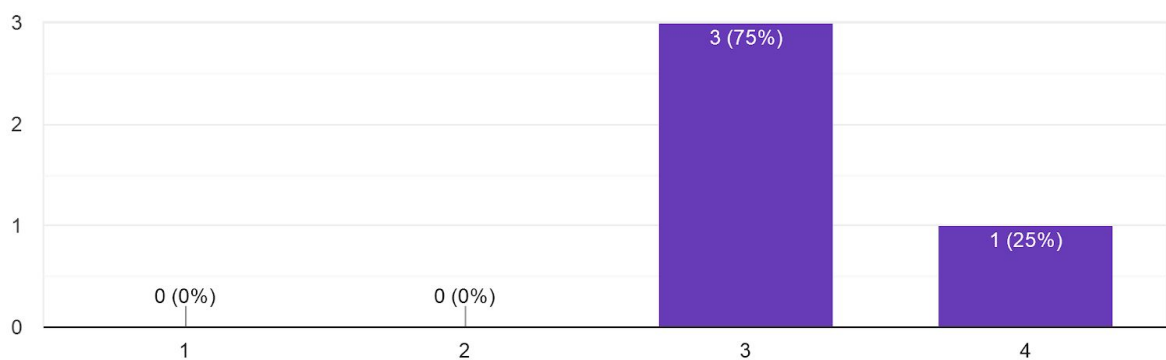


The game makes use of Unity's Universal Render pipeline to allow for stylistic lighting that makes the scenes pop, as well as creating harsh shadows around the player character. They also better highlight where the player has to go, as bright point lights spill into the levels from the exit doors, lighting the way for the player. In addition, the use of a clean, retro style set of assets (Ansimuz, 2017) means the level is aesthetically pleasing without overwhelming the player with too much visual feedback, allowing the lighting to stand out further.

## Playtesting Report

Is the gravity-switch mechanic intuitive to use?

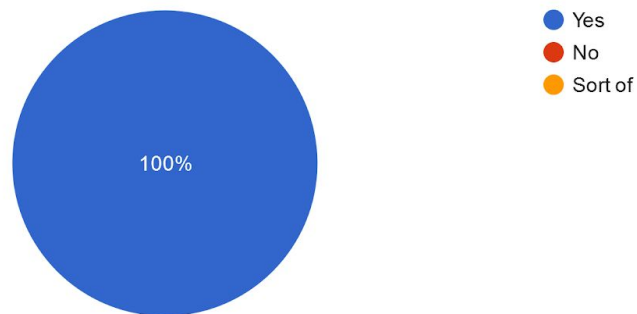
4 responses





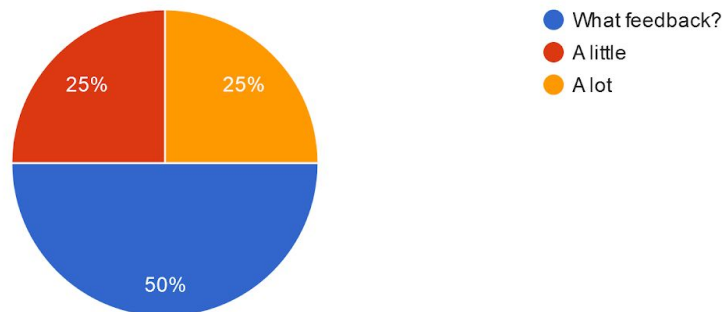
Are the controls easy to pick up?

4 responses



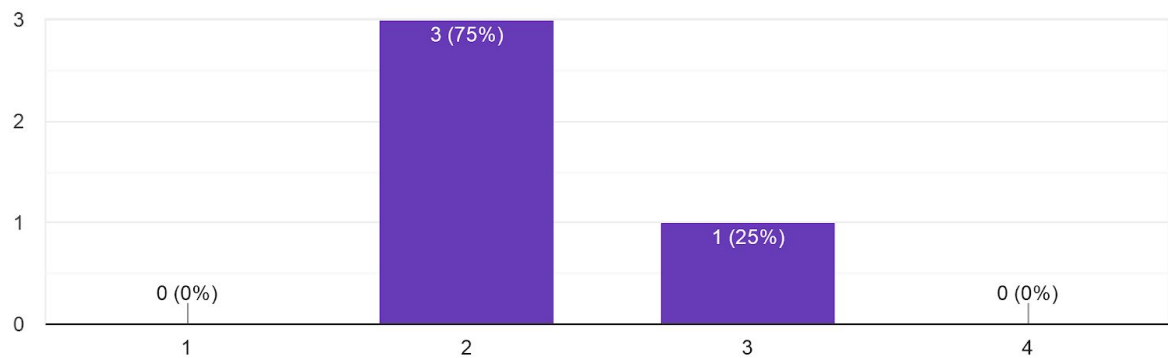
Does the feedback within the game enhance the experience?

4 responses



Overall, how responsive is the player movement?

4 responses



## Reflection

### Experiment 1

When choosing a theme from the multitude of options presented during the first prototype, I originally had two ideas - I decided to work on both of these simultaneously for a few days, exploring which of the two better fits the brief, as well as which works better as an experience on the whole. The full premise of the scrapped idea is available in the first blog post in the Appendices, but it essentially involved the player walking around the interior of a submarine, performing tasks as they repeatedly checked the windows for threats.

Whilst this was a novel idea, I feel it likely wouldn't have worked as a walking simulator - it much more suits a short horror game experience than anything, and without anywhere to really 'travel' it loses the exploration element that's key to the genre. Using the black thinking hat, I decided to leave this idea early on, in order to better focus on something that more clearly fits the brief.

On the other hand, the 'Greenhouse' idea was a much better fit, as it involved traversing a weird and wonderful location, solving puzzles as you uncover a greater mystery. From a red hat perspective this idea really seemed good to me, as it'd allow for a more open ended design to fill the *lens of Freedom* (Schell, J., 2008, p.319) whilst also exploring puzzle design.

One of the crucial elements to overcome when designing the narrative behind the game was to make the protagonist a vessel to the player. Many games create narrative by having the player control a character, with their own motivations, goals and desires that the player can help attain, building a sense of empathy and companionship as the story progresses. However, some games, like Mario in many of his games, don't adopt this approach, and instead plant the player directly within the character of the game; "*When we finally resolve that tension, there's a sense of personal accomplishment on top of any sympathetic response that we might have to the resolution of Mario's story.*" (Fullerton, T., 2014, p.106)

I wanted to replicate this feeling with the protagonist of my game - someone with no memory of previous events puts them in the same shoes as the player, increasing the immersion and allowing the player to connect with the character they're playing as they explore the weird around them together.

## Experiment 2

The theme for experiment 2 was much harder for me to interpret, and much of my time working on the prototype revolved around simply trying different ideas until I could find one that sort of worked. Indeed, my first idea for a game that fit the theme had to be removed entirely as it didn't fit the brief requirement of an 80s style arcade game, so I had to come up with something else.

Overall, I could have better managed my time with this prototype in general, which would have allowed me to better develop some of the various paper prototype ideas that arose out of the final design premise - the arcade hug-em-up *Streets of Calm*. One such idea involved the secondary loop, where a map would be presented showing the different villages the giants could tackle next, as well as showing the current morale state of each of the giants the player could control. I ended up not developing this prototype as much as I could have, and at present only one sketch exists showing the initial idea.

The main prototype I ended up exploring was the generation of different enemies for the player to pacify - this was done using pen, paper and polyhedral dice, which made it very easy for me to evaluate and rapidly test each iteration before I arrived at a more fine tuned version.

Whilst this was a good prototype that showed the impact of the mechanic off to the fullest, it is only a vertical slice - it shows the enemy generation mechanic alone, meaning there isn't a horizontal equivalent that can better show off the moment-to-moment gameplay that *Streets of Calm* could offer.

## Experiment 3

The third prototype was to be a fully realised digital prototype using the Unity engine. The theme was side effects. My initial plan to fulfill this theme was to create a simple 2D platformer that took place entirely within a single room, through which the player would experience a series of modifications to the environment and physics of the level as they moved from objective to objective within the room, with each side effect changing how traversal behaved.

This was fine in concept, but I found it quite difficult to think of a sufficient number of side effects to apply, especially when confined to a single space.



The single-room concept in general was nice for keeping myself within the scope, but otherwise fell flat and hindered the game significantly. In the end, I transitioned to a more traditional series of linear levels, omitting a smooth camera for a fixed camera that warped between rooms, similar to games like *Abe's Oddysee* (1997) and *Celeste* (2017). This lets me focus more of my attention on the movement of the player character, as well as making the player focus more on the position of their character during gameplay, as the camera is not fighting to keep it in the centre of the frame.

Overall, this proved to be a great decision, as it allowed for rapid prototyping and playtesting of levels to ensure they worked well within the core gravity-reversal mechanic, which was originally intended as one of many 'side effects' but instead became my primary way of distinguishing my game from other platformers.

The main issue with this however, is it loosens the connection my game has to the theme as a whole - as I began touching up the platforming and adding further improvements to game feel, such as lighting and player feedback, I realised that there's only really one 'side effect' at play here. Regardless, I think I created a rather simple, but nonetheless effective and juicy prototype for what will hopefully one day be a full game.

## Bibliography

1. Schell, J., 2008. *The Art of Game Design: A book of lenses*. CRC press.
2. *Midsommar* (2019) Directed by Ari Aster [Film], A24.

3. *Hotline Miami* (standard edition). 2012. Windows [Game]. Devolver Digital.
4. Muscat, A., Goddard, W., Duckworth, J. and Holopainen, J., 2016, August. First-Person Walkers: Understanding the Walker Experience through Four Design Themes. In *DiGRA/FDG*.
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9. *Celeste* (standard edition). 2018. Windows[Game]. Matt Makes Games

## Appendices

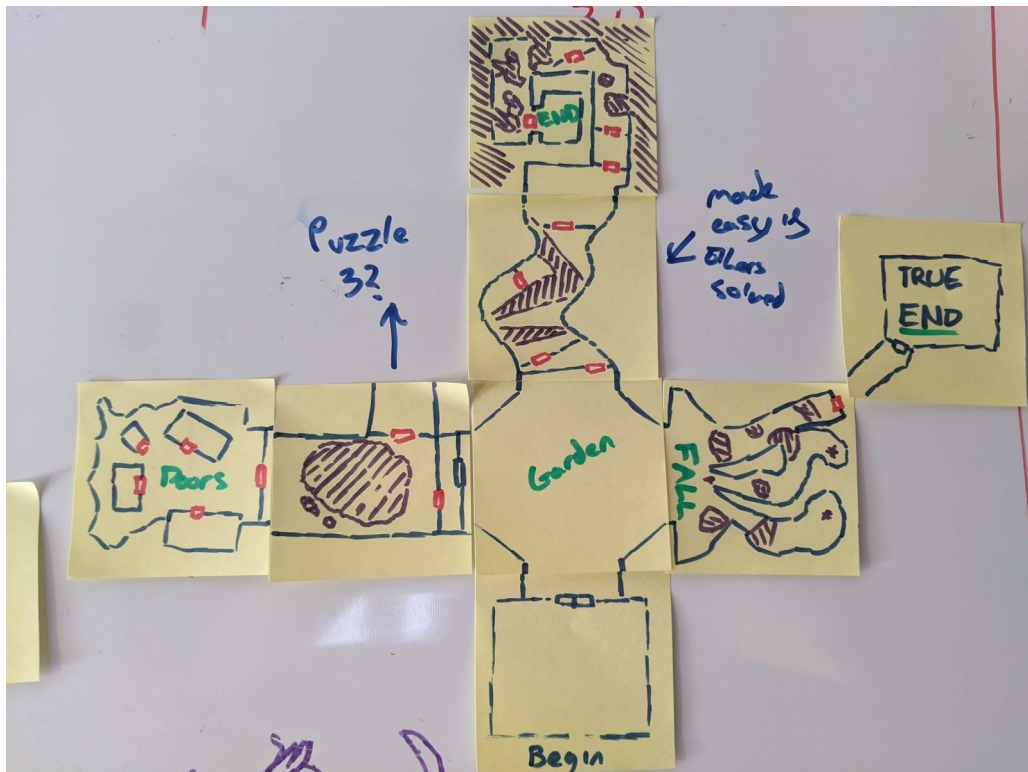
### Experiment 1

Figure 1 - Moodboard



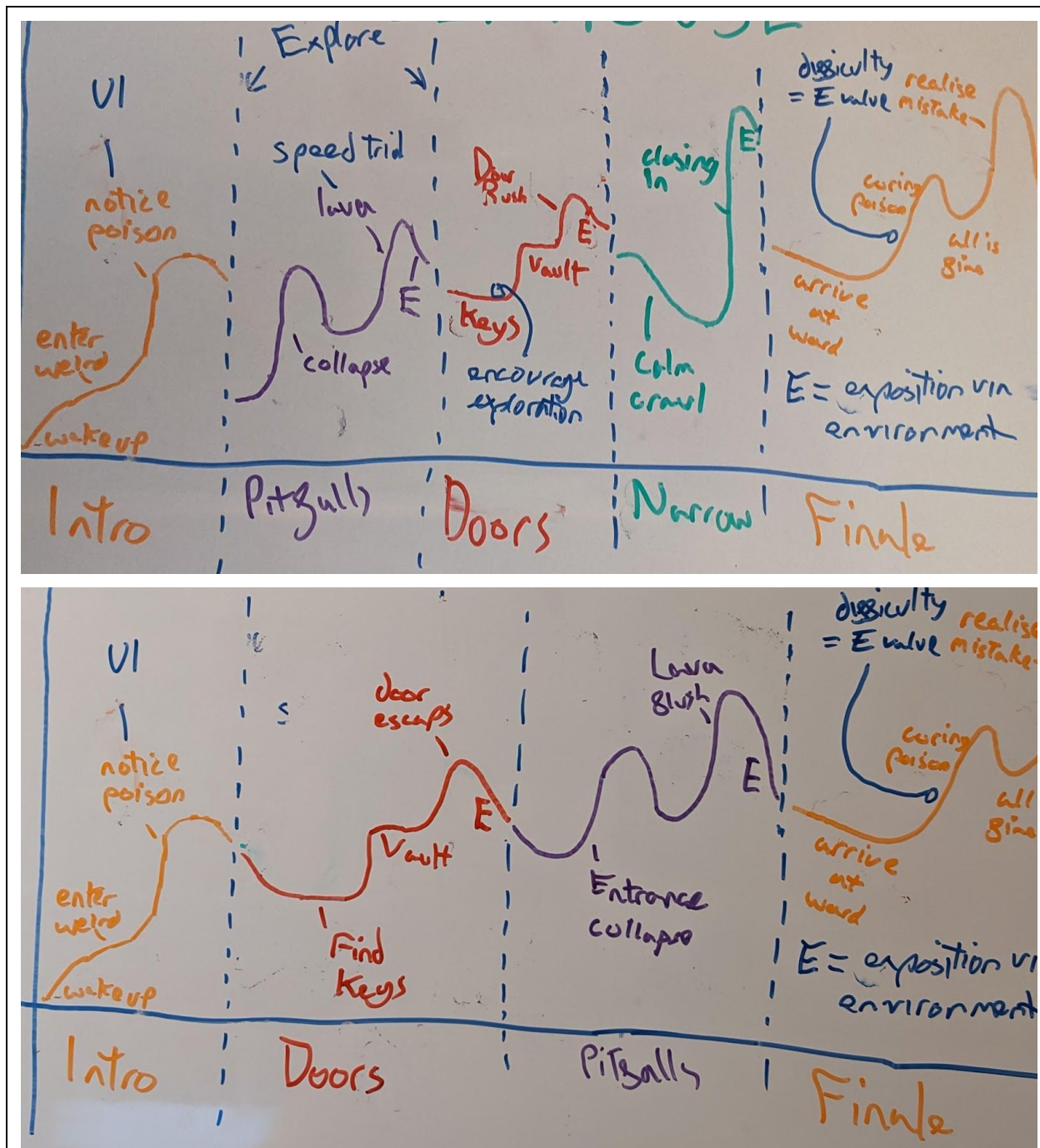
Figure 2 - Level Design Mockups





*Examples of how the layout encourages straying from the primary path.*

Figure 3 - ‘Modular’ Narrative Arc



As shown here, the optional objectives can be completed in any order - without harming the narrative tension.

#### Experiment 1 Blog posts:

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2020/10/design-diary-1-spoiled-for-choice.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2020/10/design-diary-2-environmental.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2020/10/design-diary-3-dramatic-arc-pt1.html>

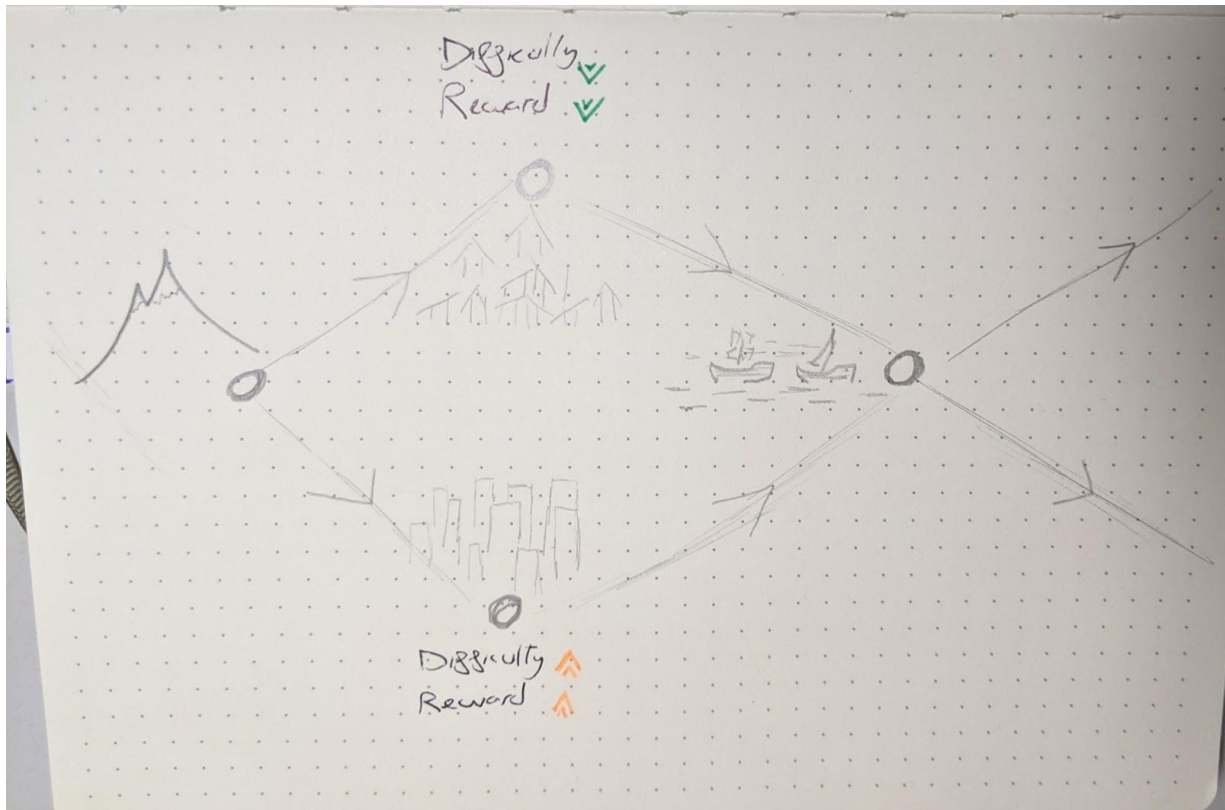
<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2020/10/design-diary-4-dramatic-arc-pt2.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2020/12/design-diary-mechanics-dynamics-acids.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2020/12/design-diary-6-playing-around-with.html>

## Experiment 2

### Paper Prototype Sketches



*An alternate prototype idea involving the secondary loop of the game.*



Enemy Size	
1	small
2	medium
3	large
4	huge

Motif	
1	Elder. (V: Bath)
2	young man (V: hugs)
3	young woman. (V: hugs)
4	Angry farmer (I: pats)
5	Upset merchant (V: pats)
6	Baron. (I: hugs)
7	Baroness. (I: hugs V: pats)
8	Village idiot. (V: bath)
9	Knight (I: hugs + pats)
10	Hermit. V: <del>bath</del> hugs

Attack type	
1	Slow high damage
2	Fast, low damage
3	All rounder
4	Ranged
5	Russian doll
6	Don

Weapon	
	Pitchfork
	Stick
	hatchet

A later iteration of the tables, showing the order in which they'd be generated.

1				2	
d4	Enemy Size	d3	Vulnerability	d8	Motiv
1	small	1	none	1	Village Elder
2	medium	2	vulnerable to hugs	2	Young man
3	Large	3	vulnerable to pets	3	Young woman
4	Huge			4	Angry Farmer
d6	Attack Type	d3	Immunity	5	Upset merchant
1	Slow; high dmg	1	none	6	Baron
2	Nimble low dmg	2	Hugs	7	Baroness
3	All rounder	3	Pets	8	Village idiot
4					
5	Ranged	d6	Weapon		
6	Russian Doll?	1	Pitchfork		
		2	Stick		
		3	none		
		4			
		5	shortsword		
		6	knitel		

*A much earlier iteration of the table, complete with separate tables for vulnerability and immunity.*

### Experiment 2 Blog Posts:

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2020/11/design-diary-new-theme-paper-prototypes.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2020/12/design-diary-6-retro-redo.html>

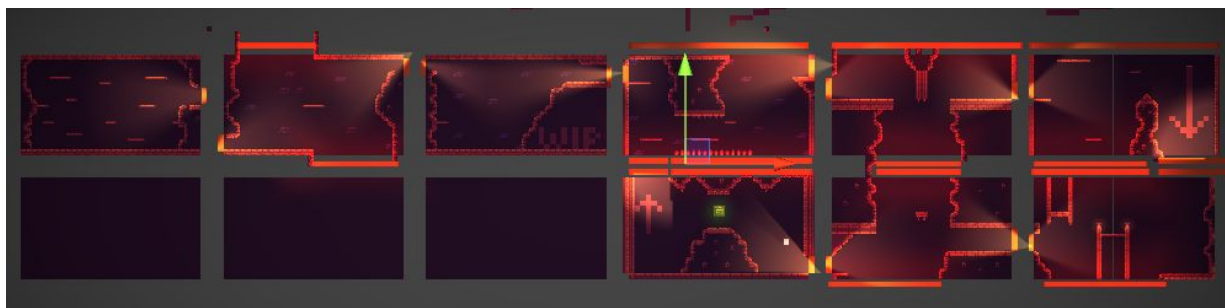
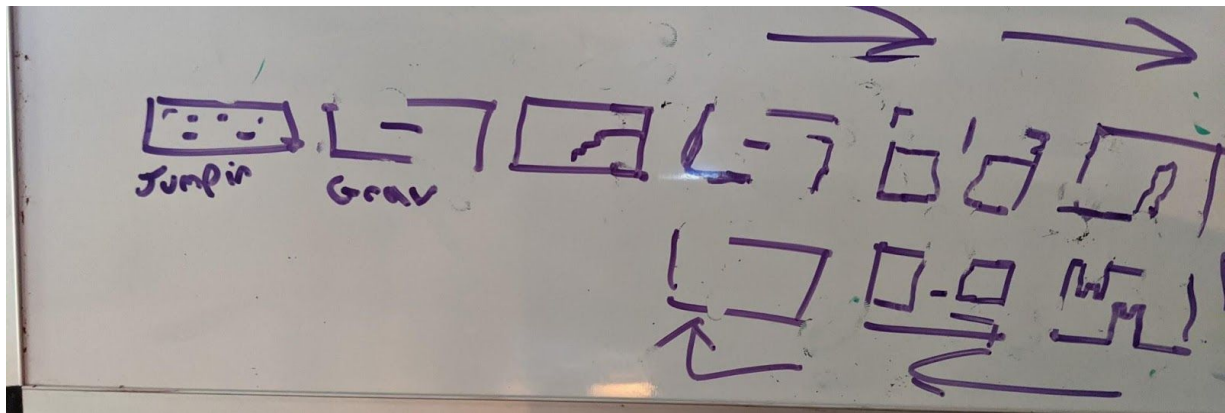
<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2021/01/design-diary-9-alternative-prototype-pt1.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2021/01/design-diary-8-paper-prototyping-pt-2.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2021/01/design-diary-12-paper-prototyping-pt2.html>

### Experiment 3

Mockup of levels vs final product:



Examples of the effect lighting/set dressing helps enhance a level:





**Experiment 3 Blog Posts:**

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2021/01/design-diary-10-new-theme-game-feel.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2021/01/design-diary-1-loops-and-levels.html>

<https://almightygizzard.blogspot.com/2021/01/design-diary-playing-around-with-scene.html>